

The Vanishing Minority of the Loyal Legion
with a brief sketch of the Order.

Read before The Ohio Commandery of the
Loyal Legion

April 4, 1917,

by

S. C. Ayres, M. D.
Late Brevet Captain and Assistant
Surgeon U. S. Volunteers.

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The surrender of the Confederate army at Appomattox ended the four years bloody contest between the North and the South, and settled forever the question of slavery on this continent. The booming of cannon ceased, and the people went wild with joy. In every city, town and hamlet the same enthusiastic rejoicing prevailed.

After four years of bloody war, with its disappointing vicissitudes, at last the Union was saved and the country freed from the curse of slavery. What the people had hoped for and prayed for and fought for had at last been realized, and shouts of joy and triumph went up all over the land.

These days and nights of rejoicing were destined to be few and to be followed by the deepest grief and sorrow. A foul assassin's bullet penetrated the brain of Mr. Lincoln, who was taking an hour of relaxation and pleasure after the strain of more than four years of unparalleled responsibility. The depth and sincerity of this national grief cannot be measured or estimated. From bonfires and cheering and music, and undisguised happiness to mourning emblems everywhere on houses, public and private buildings, and streets, with flags at half mast, was a sudden and terrible fall.

The day after President Lincoln was assassinated, a few army officers in Philadelphia came together to draft suitable resolutions respecting his untimely death. They formed themselves into an organization to be known as the Military Order of Loyal Legion of the United States. It became very popular and many of the leading officers soon took an active part, and the Loyal Legion grew until it included many of the prominent officers of the army and navy, who resided in the State of Pennsylvania. At first it was a local organization, but soon Commanderies were organized in other states, and it was made national in its scope. State after state applied for charters to establish Commanderies, until finally twenty-one Commanderies were established in the different states of the North.

The objects* of the organization are in the following words:

“The objects of this Order shall be to cherish the memories and associations of the war waged in defense of the unity and indivisibility of the republic; strengthen the test of fraternal fellowship and sympathy formed by companionship-in-arms; advance the best interests of the soldiers and sailors of the United States, especially of those associated as companions of this Order, and extend all possible relief to their widows and children; foster the cultivation of military and naval science; enforce unqualified allegiance to the General Government; protect the rights and liberties of American citizenship, and maintain National Honor, Union and Independence.”

The Ohio Commandery the 9th in number, was duly authorized and the first stated meeting held Feb. 7th, 1883. The other Commanderies were organized as follows: Pennsylvania, April 15, '65, New York and Maine in '66, Massachusetts, '68, California in '71, Wisconsin in '74, Illinois in '79, District of Columbia, '82 and Ohio, 1883. Previous to this, there was a military organization here known as the Ex-army and Navy Society, which had a large membership and held many interesting and spirited meetings. The Loyal Legion was organized out of this society and it then ceased to exist.

The Military Order of the Loyal Legion of Ohio was installed on February 7, 1883, with twenty-nine original members. All of

these have answered the roll call with the exception of two, Capt. Foraker and our President-elect, Capt. Blair. It is a great satisfaction to know, that this long deserved honor has at last been conferred upon one most worthy to fill it.

Twenty-six members of the Pennsylvania Commandery came out to install the Ohio Commandery. They were headed by Rear Admiral Emmons, U. S. N., and among the distinguished officers was Col. John P. Nicholson, who has been the Recorder-in-Chief of the Order ever since its organization—may he live to be its Recorder for many years to come. They were met at the station by a committee and escorted to the Burnet House. The banquet was held at 9 p. m. on the 7th of February. The dining-room at the Burnet was never so gorgeously decorated. On one side of the room was suspended the word "Army" in white immortelles and on the opposite side, the word "Navy" in deep crimson immortelles. On the tables were the following: a large six-sided fort, with walls made of green hemlock and white immortelles, surmounted by a miniature cannon—a magnificent ship sailing on a sea of lilies—swords crossed on a bank of floweres and a floral cannon. The chandeliers were hung with wreaths of smilax and loops of the same were caught up on the walls. Thus was our order inaugurated with as good military material as could be found in the country.

We point with pride to the distinguished offieers, who have presided over our Order as commanders, let me mention Gen. Hayes, Gen. W. T. Sherman, Col. Dawes, Gen. Jacob D. Cox, Gen. Benj. Harrison, Gen. Hickenlooper, Gen. Cowan, Gen. Warner. We cannot recall this list, without special mention of Col. Dawes, the most accomplished presiding officer and toastmaster the Commandery ever had. We put special emphasis on this fact, that no other Commandery can boast of three Presidents, Hayes, Harrison and McKinley.

Let me reminisce a little about the first annual dinner which I attended, that of 1885. I joined the Commandery in May, 1884, and the second annual dinner was held February 4, 1885, at the Burnet House. Commander General Hayes presided at the business meeting in the afternoon and while I was looking on and listening, he recognized a tall fine looking man, whom he ealled Capt. Morey.

It took but a glance to see in the speaker, one of my old college chums and a member of Co. B. 20th O. V. I. in the first three months service. I soon made myself known to him and it was surely a cordial greeting which I received. I then hunted up Maj. Chamberlin, who was in the same company and we three had a very pleasant reunion, as we had not seen each other since we were discharged from the service in 1861, a period of twenty-four years.

Great preparations were made for the banquet and a large number of inviations sent apparently to all the leading Army and Navy offieers then alive. It would be impossible to name them all, I can only mention a few — Gens. Hancock, Fairehild, Sheridan, Sherman, Chief Justice Waite, Admiral Porter, Vice Admiral Rowan, Rear Admiral Worden, Gens. Buell, Crook, Meigs, Doubleday, Schofield, Stanley, Howard, Pope, Hazen and many others.

Col. Dayton was chairman of the committee of arrangements. The surviving Cineimnati members of the committee are Maj. Hosea, Capt. Wilshire, Maj. Fox, and Maj. Jones.

Gen. Hayes presided and including five invited guests one hundred and twenty-seven sat down at the table. The menu was fine, blue points, green turtle soup, roast quail, sweetbreads, turkey salad and four kinds of wine, think of that compared with our menus of to-day. Mr. Zimmerman, proprietor of the Burnet House was a Prince of hosts, took great pride in doing the best possible for the Loyal Legion. We were given as a souvenir of the occasion a small brass cannon, cast especially for the occasion and gun carriage complete. Inserted in each cannon, was the rammer, with a sponge appearing at the muzzle. The rammer formed the staff around which was folded a small satin flag, on which was printed in gold the program of the evening. The gun carriage bore the legend Ohio Commandery on one side, and Loyal Legion on the other and the year 1884 was cast in the cannon. It was a real servicable piece of ordinance as I know, for my boys attached it to a block of wood and had a lot of fun firing it, and it was a source of pleasure to them for a long time.

In the early life of the Order, meetings were held monthly and they also had more papers read than we have now. In 1884, eight

papers; '85, five papers; '86, seven papers; '87, six papers; '88, seven papers; '89, seven papers. Of course there was an abundance of material to draw from then and the officers who had taken an active part in the different campaigns, were quite willing to contribute to the entertainment of their comrades.

The Commandery now holds four stated meeting each year in addition to the annual meeting, which comes on the first Wednesday of May.

The papers which have been read before the Commandery, have been carefully preserved and bound and we now have seven volumes of such contributions, and they contain much of value to the historian. Nearly all the contributors of higher rank to the earlier volumes have passed away. Genls. Force, Bates, Leggett, Hazen, Fuller, Cox, Voris, Stanley, Dawes, Doolittle, Beatty, Hick-enlooper are all gone, but they have left valuable papers, touching their individual experiences in their army service. It is not only in these men of rank, men who commanded brigades and divisions and corps, that the Loyal Legion shows that it is slowly passing away, but in the loss of hundreds of officers of lower rank. Little by little the members of the first class have lost ground and now find themselves in the minority.

Many of the originals are approaching four score years and some have passed beyond that biblical period. During the last five years the average loss among them has been thirty-one, but that average will be increased from now on.

In April, 1915, the originals of the Ohio Commandery dropped from the majority to the minority. At the present time the originals constitute 45% and the juniors 55% of our membership.

It is interesting to note the status of some of the other commanderies. In Pennsylvania the ratio is 36% originals to 64% juniors. In Massachusetts, 46% to 64%. California, 35% to 65%. New York, 48% to 52%. In Colorado and Iowa is 50% and 50%. In two commanderies only, Indiana and Maine, are the originals in the majority and that by only a small per cent.

The last report from the headquarters of the commandery shows a told membership 6722 of which 43% are originals and 57% juniors.

The only hope for the survival of the Order is in the enlistment of junior members. Were stagnation exists it means retrogression and where the originals are in the majority, it shows either marked indifference to the Order, or that the veterans were lacking in sufficient number of sons to perpetuate their names.

One word about the third class or honorary members—only two are still living and they belong to the California Commandery. Ohio had ten honorary members, three of them residents of our city, Mr. Jas. E. Murdock, Robert W. Burnet, Aaron F. Perry. You are familiar with the sacrifices which Mr. Murdock made when he cancelled his theatrical engagements and devoted his life to the welfare of the soldiers. For four years he gave readings and recitations for the benefit of the soldiers in the field, but he did more he went down into the camps and entertained the soldiers there. His younger son was killed at Chickamauga, but his older son, Capt. J. E. Murdock of the 2nd O. V. I. still lives in the suburbs and is a member of our Order.

A fine portrait of Mr. Murdock painted by the poet-artist, T. Buchanan Read, hangs on our Library wall, a gift of Mr. Murdock's daughter. The association of these two distinguished men reecalls the poem of Sheridan's Ride, written by the latter and recited by Mr. Murdock at Pike's Opera House. It was on the 31st of October, 1864, when there was to be a grand rally for the election of Mr. Lincoln. The poem was written during the day and Mr. Murdock recited it in the evening before an immense audience. It produued a tremendous effect, the entire audience was eletrified by the stirring words and the eloquent manner in which they were delivered by Mr. Murdock. The patriotic fervor of this poem immediately appealed to the loyal spirits of the North and it is one of the few poems will never be forgotten.

Mr. Perry devoted much time in the critical period of 1861 in assisting Gov. Dennison, his former law partner, in matters of

inter-state affairs, which required care and judgment in the chaotic condition of things.

Mr. Burnet was active in the commission organized for the relief of soldiers and their families. A distinguished member of his Class was Hon. James Speed, of Louisville. He was a Union man —when it took courage to be one. He was a warm personal friend of Mr. Lincoln and was his Attorney-General.

What is the great attraction which military organizations have for the veterans? The writer has been asked, "Why do you always go to these meetings—you hear the same old war stories; you sing the same old songs; you mee the same old grizzled crowd." An answer to this was given by Gen. H. V. Boynton in response to a toast at our annual meeting in 1902. The toast was the "Soldier's World." I quote: "Only those who have been baptized under the Flag with the baptism of war can enter a world so real to us in which with the great armies of our comrades we live and move alone."

"Ours was a costly citizenship, for it we gave the best years of opening manhood; for it we put aside life-plans, business interests, family ties, everything that was attractive either to youth or maturer years, and gave it all without hesitation gladly and even with exultation, although our hearts responded as human hearts ever will and should, over such partings as sanctified our entrance into the soldiers' world. It is a world which none but soldiers can understand or even measurably appreciate. Its emotions, its aspirations, the sweep of its memories, the rush of the ocean tides of feeling, the gloom of its defeats, the joy and pride and exultation of victories, the sorrows for its dead and the loves of its living, cannot be counterfeited by any skill of man. There can be no naturalized citizen in our soldier world—no form of petition, certificate or oath can secure it. No court has power sufficient to confer it. Our world is a creation by soldiers for soldiers alone."

There is indeed a certain charm and fascination about the meetings of our soldiers, which no one outside of the army can appreciate. When a man holds up his right hand and swears allegiance to the country and the Flag, he sets himself apart from

citizens. He becomes a unit in a great fighting machine we call an army. He offers his life to save the country. When he returns to civil life again, is it any wonder that he loves to talk over the stirring scenes of his army life? He meets no more willing listener than a comrade who has had similar experience and can sympathize with him.

At our stated meeting in March, 1890, Gen. John Beatty, who has only recently answered the last roll call, made a short after-dinner speech, in which he said: "There is no man in this country, nor any other, as far as I know, so rich, so scholarly, so high socially, so distinguished politically, as not to take pride and pleasure in tracing his lineage back to a soldier. If there has been a soldier in the family, it is the one thing the family never forgets, the one thing the biographer never fails to mention. In brief, the father's military record is the son's patent of nobility. I never envy a man when he tells me his father or grandfather was rich, but when he tells me his grandfather was with old Ethan Allen at the storming of Ticonderoga, or with Washington at Valley Forge, I bow instinctively to the old man's blood running in the young man's veins, for I know he has something no one can take from either himself or his children, the spirit of the true knights and gentlemen of the earth.

"If men could obtain your military record, your knowledge of the movements of the great armies, your recollection of great battle-fields, without incurring risks of bodily harm and by simply paying money for it, there would be many buyers; but do you think there would be any sellers? Not one."

An appreciation of the Loyal Legion is given by H. Perry Robinson, Literary Editor of the London Times, in the Twentieth Century American. In writing what the civil war had done for America, he says:

"It is already beginning to slip into the farther reaches of the peoples' memory, but twenty-five years ago the echoes of the guns had hardly died away, the minds of the people were still inspired. It was an awful and a splendid experience for the nation. It is not necessary with Emerson 'always to respect war hereafter,' but there have been times when it seemed to me that I would rather

be able to wear that little tri-colored button of the American Loyal Legion than any other decoration of the world."

We are living in the most critical period of the world's existence—I make this statement with full consideration of all the great upheavals and revolutions and wars which history relates. All the great European nations are engaged in a titanic struggle and blood is flowing as it never flowed before.

It is Imperialism against Democracy and it must be a fight to the finish, and it can and must end in only one way. We have been drawn into it and must do our share to bring about a peace which will mean Universal peace and put it beyond the power of one man to start such a conflagration. I have every confidence in the patriotism of the American people, they will rally to the defense of the country and show the world that they have not degenerated since '61-'65.

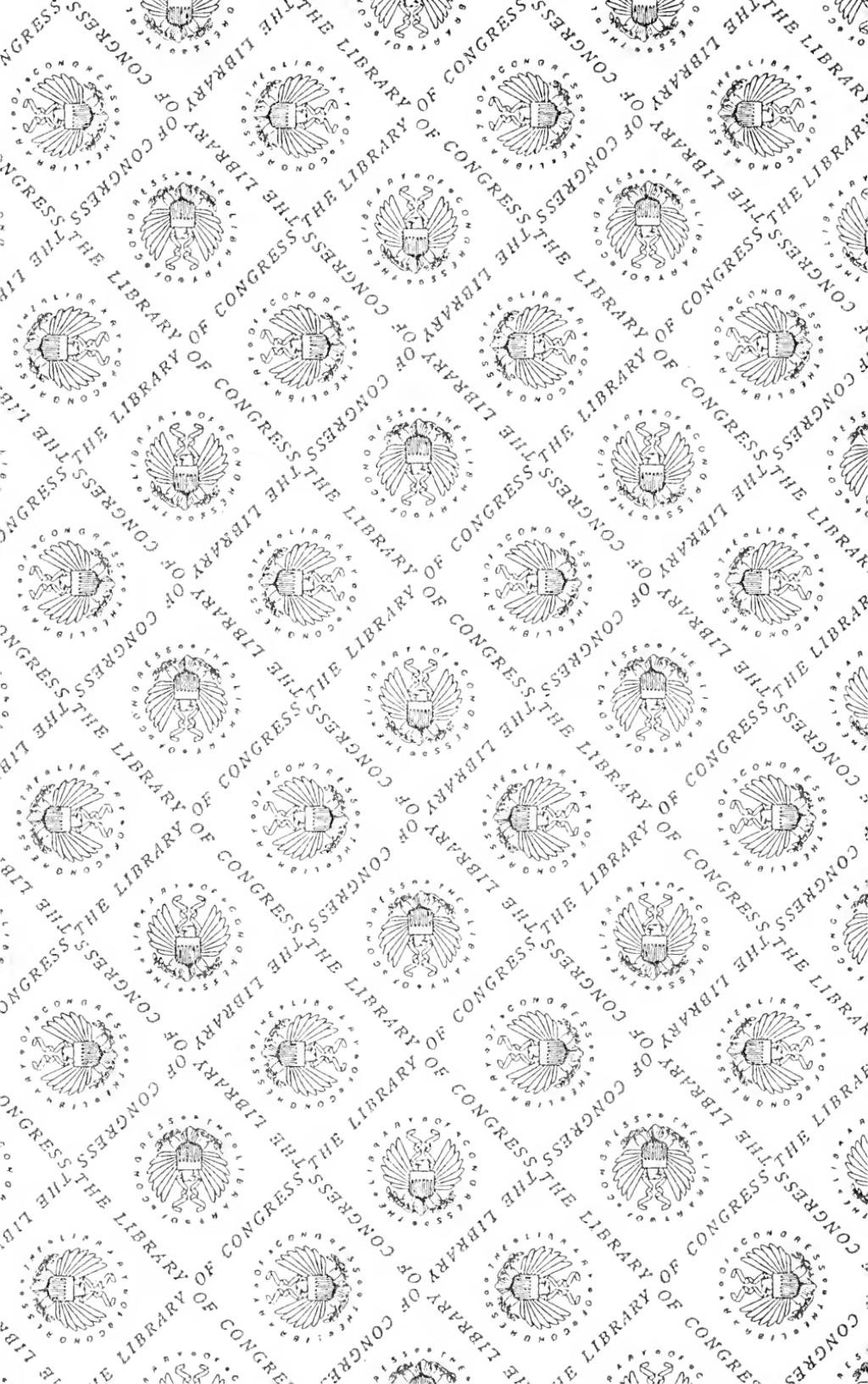
During the Civil War we had much to contend with besides fighting the open enemy—there were copperheads and butternuts and Knights of the Golden Circle and spies and enemies everywhere. There were many of them in our City and being a border town it was naturally a convenient place for plots and plotters.

Rumors of foreign spies and enemies in our midst and open and disguised disloyalty, and plots against the peace of our Country are heard on every hand, and the time has come to act and resent the insults which an arrogant nation has offered us in order to draw us into this great maelstrom of war which is spreading its unheard of and undreamed of cruelties all over Europe. There will be a great National uprising to repel this foreign danger and the response will reproduce, in a different way however scenes which many of us remember in 1861.

Will we sing, we are coming Woodrow Wilson three hundred thousand more as we used to sing, we are coming father Abraham three hundred thousand more?

I have faith in the patriotism of the American people—they will rise to the occasion and will help to crush out the most dangerous enemy to peace and justice and humanity and National morals which the world has ever seen.

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